The Vulnerability of Foreign Immigrants in Japan and the Role of Global Citizenship Education in Rethinking Community

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Differences in race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality can lead people to being discriminatory and xenophobic, which eventually exclude vulnerable populations from society, such as immigrants. Even though Japan is not a big hosting country of immigrants, foreigners are facing various problems in society, which are caused by intolerance toward differences deeply rooted in mentality of Japanese people. Furthermore, immigrant children also struggle with fitting into Japanese public-school environments. Due to such circumstances in Japan, foreign families are not able to connect with their local communities, which bring more vulnerability and isolation. In examining the vulnerability and isolation problem these foreign families face in Japan, this paper builds on Nicholas V. Longo's definition of civic learning, looks at Hull House founded by Jane Addams as an example of civic learning, and finally explores the idea of global citizenship education advocated by Daisaku Ikeda. By examining the role of education in bringing communities together, the paper offers the implication of an important ideological shift in Japanese society to strive for creating a coexisting community where both Japanese people and foreign families can mutually thrive.

The General Situation of Immigrants in Japan

Approximately in the past 30 years, Japan has been experiencing an increase in the number of foreign residents living and working in the country (Komai, 2000). This is partly due to its own population decrease, which requires Japan to rely on foreign labor forces. Although this population contributes to Japanese economy by providing indispensable labor forces, Japanese society still regards these foreign workers as "second class" citizens (Tanno, 2010). Not

receiving enough resources or help, they are isolated within communities. As a result, the lives of these immigrant families remain vulnerable, leaving them in isolation within communities in Japanese society. In this section, the isolated situation of immigrant parents and children will be illustrated.

Negative Perception of Foreigners in Japanese Society

Foreign residents are excluded from society because of the perception Japanese people have towards them, characterized by negative impressions such as indifference and fear. Arguing that it is necessary both for Japanese and foreigners to create an alternative co-existing system, Jung (2004) pointed out that Japanese tend to have "no interest at all in the issue of the labor shortage predicted in the future or that of foreign workers as members of Japanese society" (p.58). Moreover, Japanese media influences the perception of foreign residents by portraying them exclusively as unemployed figures and criminals, ignoring the fact that these people are prevented from accessing resources in society, including citizenship, proper jobs, and education (Gordon, 2009). As a result, Japanese people have been maintaining the attitude that fundamentally regards foreigners "as people to be controlled and monitored rather than as equal contributors in Japanese society" (Komai, 2000, p.322).

Stigmatized as negative figures, foreign residents are given a limited access to opportunities in society. Gordon (2009) observed lives of foreign families and described their difficulties of finding decent jobs and housing in Japan. Researching at the school where the majority of children have foreign parents, he reported that all the foreign parents are working as temporary, non-regular employees. It means that even though they work full-time, they do not receive benefits and are at risk of being fired at any time. Nevertheless, they are not able to complain about the difficult working environment since employers also arrange their housing. It

is because foreigners are often unable to get housing contracts on their own in Japan (Gordon, 2009). It brings a dilemma to these foreign residents because objecting to their employer can lead to losing their job as well as housing. Also revealing a high divorce rate in the community where he observed, Gordon (2009) concluded that these foreign residents are left in serious isolation.

Isolation of Foreigners in Communities

Marginalized in communities, immigrants do not have any space to connect with Japanese residents. Reyes-Ruiz (2005) contended that immigrants have limited means for integrating themselves with the general population, partly influenced by the country's history having had little immigration. It is possible that these immigrants form an ethnic community with other people coming from the same country. However, it is also true that the creation of ethnic enclaves causes immigrants to be further isolated from Japanese society (Komai, 2000). For example, Latin American immigrants, having their own communities, seem to be isolated from Japanese society at large (Jung, 2004; Reyes-Ruiz, 2005). Although these networks based on ethnicity provide more connections to other immigrants, solving their isolation problem also requires interactions with Japanese residents, which can develop significant interpersonal relationships and a sense of community.

Even though immigrants and Japanese people are living in the same community in some cases, it is hard for them to create a community bond just by living there. In fact, according to Komai (2000), there is fewer ethnic ghettos in Japan historically, compared to other big immigrant hosting countries, such as the United States. Neither Shinjuku nor Ikebukuro areas, which have high rates of foreign residents, have ethnic ghettos. There are a lot of neighborhoods in which foreigners and Japanese cohabit. Japan has mostly maintained a mixed housing structure, with little distinction between social classes in terms of living spaces. This has

prevented ethnic groups from being ghettoized (Komai, 2000). Nevertheless, there are barriers made out of indifference and rejection between foreign and Japanese residents. Accordingly, foreign and Japanese residents have little or even no communication. This can work as a disadvantage of immigrants when there is a neighborhood trouble, such as not following rules of garbage collection and making noises without knowing the norm and culture in Japan. Gordon (2009) also affirms that living in the same neighborhoods "does not automatically create a common bond" (p.168).

The Struggles of Immigrant Children

As the number of cross-cultural marriages increases, there is a growing number of children who have foreign parents studying in Japanese public schools. In the central part of Tokyo, about 20 percent of children have at least one foreign parent (Jung, 2004). Also, roughly 3 percent of children all over Japan are born to foreign parents (Jung, 2004). The problem accompanying this demographic change at Japanese public schools is that teachers and administrators do not know how to accommodate such diverse students in a traditional curriculum. Reyes-Ruiz (2005) asserts that there are no Japanese schools specifically dedicated to integrating immigrant children into the educational system by providing a care for language barriers and culture gaps. Similarly arguing that the Japanese educational system "was never designed to respond to the needs of 'outsiders'" (p.767), Gordon (2006) also claims that these marginalized students face their challenges, including academic and personal identity issues.

Failing to acknowledge differences among students, the Japanese educational system is not able to offer help to these immigrant students. In one large school district, approximately 50 percent of foreign students never enters senior high schools (Gordon, 2006). This is largely due to their ability of academic language skills. Those who go on to senior high schools have a low

retention rate, and the schools to which they have access provide little in preparing them for higher education or future employment (Gordon, 2006). Subsequently, they have limited choices of jobs and often end up taking part-time jobs that do not sufficiently sustain their lives. In addition to an academic issue, these children tend to face a personal identity issue because Japanese are likely to view them as temporary residents. Those children are sometimes subjected to discriminative attitudes and thus, feel alienated in Japanese society. Being vulnerable, immigrant children face these difficult challenges, which are said to be the cause of violence, drugs, organized crime, and early pregnancy (Gordon, 2006).

What Civic Learning Can Offer

Although local governments and non-governmental organizations in some areas support these immigrants in terms of increasing the quality of their life, their help does not reach foreign families in all areas in Japan. Moreover, it is necessary to bring an ideological shift in Japanese people's mentality to view foreign families as mutual community members of society; only by shifting Japanese people's perspective, it is possible to resolve the isolation problem of foreign families in communities. In the next section, the paper examines Nicholas V. Longo's definition of civic learning and what it can offer for the vulnerable population in Japan. Also, the paper looks at Hull House founded by Jane Addams as an example of civic learning. Even though the model of civic learning and its example are from a Western perspective, the U.S. has a much larger history of immigration from which Japan can learn. It is worth examining as they can provide an important philosophy of regarding everyone as a mutual community member. Lastly, the paper explores the idea of global citizenship education advocated by Daisaku Ikeda, as a foundational philosophy of civic learning.

The Definition of Civic Learning

In *Why Community Matters*, Longo (2007) explores an important role that education plays in cultivating people's civic life in communities. In this context, education serves all people in the community, including parents and children, rather than only educating children in the classroom in traditional school-centered learning. By broadening the definition of education, he illustrates civic learning as something in which schools and community institutions work together to actualize informal education in a community. He further argues that, throughout the time, civic learning has offered a way to address the issues in communities, allowing people living there to have a better access to resources. The key to a successful civic learning is an "asset-based and citizen-centered approach" (Longo, 2007, p.44), which community members themselves find their own strengths by focusing on their capabilities rather than inabilities. This approach is essential to improve the community bond in Japan as well. Japanese people need to start viewing immigrants as assets. In other words, immigrants are the ones who can bring diversity to communities, rather than people who create only problems.

Influence of Civic Learning on Children

Carrying out civic learning in a community not only helps its members be connected but also provides an opportunity for their children to learn outside their school. Emphasizing the importance of placing the entire community for students' learning, Longo explains that a local community can be an integral part of curriculum for students living there. For example, an educator Leonardo Covello from the U.S. also saw the significance of community for educational purposes. Being an Italian immigrant himself, Covello acknowledged civic learning has potentialities to validate immigrant students' experiences and their students' home cultures (Longo, 2007). The more diverse a community is, the more students living there learn about diversity. In addition, the Coalition for Community Schools listed benefits of community

schools; one of them is “I[i]ncreased family stability and greater family involvement with schools” (Longo, 2007, p.34). Civic learning enables children to have a better learning environment as well. Immigrant children in Japan can also receive benefits from civic learning as they are struggling with finding their spaces at schools because of their differences in culture and language.

Hull House as an Example of Civic Learning

Highly evaluating Jane Adams’s work in the history of education, Longo also introduced Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago, as an example of civic learning. Hull House was founded by Jane Addams and her co-worker in 1889. Residents of Hull House took a reciprocal approach to the community, valuing ordinary people’s talents (Addams, 2014). Also, Hull House played an important role in connecting people in the neighborhood to community institutions, such as health care centers and schools (Addams, 2014). Addams depicted Hull House as a place where workers bring those who would otherwise be left out of “the circle of knowledge and fuller life” (Longo, 2007, p.59). By discussing Hull House, this section aims to show a concrete example of how to actualize civic learning in an effective way, ultimately considering the vulnerability and isolation problem immigrants face in Japanese society.

The Labor Museum created in 1900 highlights the core value of Hull House. The Labor Museum was a place where immigrants could teach their fellow community members their cultural activities, such as cooking, sewing, and dancing. The classes they offered included breadmaking, spinning, weaving, bookbinding, pottery-making, and wood carving, just to name a few (Longo, 2007). One of the goals of the Labor Museum was to put the immigrants’ home country’s talents to good use at Hull House. The Labor Museum not only provided meaningful jobs to immigrants but also enabled them to transform their label from those in need to those

who were capable. Through cultural activities at the Labor Museum, immigrants were able to engage with other community members, establishing a mutual relationship. This learning opportunity also "distill[s] a sense of pride in their cultural heritage to children struggling between American and immigrant identities" (Longo, 2007, p.63). If implemented in the Japanese context, this model of the Labor Museum can serve as an actual way to realize an "asset-based and citizen-centered approach," which was previously mentioned.

Not only educational scholars but also ordinary citizens recognize the practice at Hull House for its underlying philosophy that regards everyone as a mutual community member. Addams's educational ideas and practices had an influence of an educator John Dewey, who also recognized the importance of civic learning. Observing the Hull House settlement, Dewey found diverse population there and asserted that this condition at Hull House "promote[s] their getting acquainted with the best side of each other" (Longo, 2007, p.24). Acknowledging that a new educational approach was required at the turn of the twentieth century, Dewey believed that education was more than schooling and could broaden conception of citizenship. Additionally, Koua Yang Her, a Hmong immigrant, said that "Jane Addams School has taught me that I have the power to help my community. There is a power when people share ideas and work together. One thing is for sure: one person can't do it alone" (Longo, 2007, p.98). This approach of civic learning has potentialities to help immigrants in isolated environments in Japan to create positive change in communities by shifting Japanese people's mentality.

Global Citizenship Education as Foundation of Civic Learning

It is also worthwhile to look at a framework that can be a foundation of civic learning from an Eastern perspective. Daisaku Ikeda, Buddhist peace-builder, philosopher, and educator advocated the idea of global citizenship. In 1993, Ikeda delivered a university address at

Teachers College, Columbia University on "education for global citizenship" where he stated that wisdom, courage, and compassion were three essential elements for becoming a global citizen. In the foreword of *Light of Learning* in which Ikeda's writings on his educational philosophy are introduced, a prominent Ikeda/Soka studies in education scholar, Jason Goulah described that Ikeda's approach to education was "radiant with the belief that each of us matters and all of us possess the infinite potential to develop in our own humanity and pioneer a better age" (2021, p. viii). This idea resonates with the underlying philosophy of what Jane Adams practiced by establishing Hull House to open the pathway for each immigrant to contribute to their own community in their own way.

In the same university address, Ikeda mentioned an American educational reformer John Dewey, and a progenitor of value-creating education Tsunsaburo Makiguchi, in thinking about global citizenship education. It is said that Dewey and Adams each had an influence on their educational philosophy. Ikeda, in the address, asserted that "[b]oth Dewey and Makiguchi looked beyond the limits of the nation-state to new horizons of human community. Both, it could be said, had a vision of global citizenship, of people capable of value creation on a global scale" (2021, p. 6). According to Ikeda, Dewey advocated for the need of people-centered learning, and similarly Makiguchi also put an emphasis on the importance of fostering global citizens in local communities (2021). For Makiguchi, education was a way to impart a sense of belonging in each person through nurturing one's commitment to the community, to the country, and to the world (Goulah, 2020). Underscoring both Dewey and Makiguchi acknowledged the significance of people and their local community, Ikeda claimed that "education for global citizenship should be undertaken as an integral part of daily life in our local communities" (2021, p. 10). This perspective can be a foundational philosophy of civic learning, and also is necessary to help

currently isolated immigrants and their children in Japan to realize their vast potential and ability to contribute to society.

Conclusion

Through examining the vulnerability and isolation problem of the foreign families in Japan, it is revealed that the stance of Japanese people should be changed, which regard foreign families not as equal community members of society. In order to analyze the general situation of immigrants in Japan, the paper looked at the negative perception of foreigners and their isolation within communities in Japanese society. The struggles of immigrant children also indicated the seriousness of their problems. The analysis showed that foreign families, isolated in communities, were not able to connect with other Japanese residents, which put them in a vulnerable position. Also, the paper drew from Nicholas V. Longo's definition of civic learning. Presenting Longo's argument about civic learning showcased how education can play a role in bringing communities together. In addition, Hull House founded by Jane Addams offered an example of civic learning. Crystallized in the creation of the Labor Museum, the philosophy of Hull House conveyed an important lesson that is also applicable to addressing the issues immigrants are currently facing in Japanese society. Finally, the idea of global citizenship education advocated by Daisaku Ikeda presented an Eastern perspective that can be a foundational philosophy of civic learning. By emphasizing the importance of fostering global citizens in local communities, Ikeda's idea on global citizenship education showed a possibility to bring a pivotal change to Japanese people's mentality.

It is still necessary to consider how to apply the model of civic learning exemplified in Hull House into Japanese society in a practical sense. However, as the paper suggested, it is equally important to think about an ideological shift in Japanese society to strive for creating a

coexisting community. Having more and more immigrants and their children, Japan will be challenged to change its social structure based on intolerance towards foreign families. Nevertheless, if Japan actualizes creating a coexisting society that truly benefits everyone, as a mutual community member, Japan can be a role model for the rest of the Eastern countries in this global era.

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